

7.25.11 Kathy's telephone interview with John Afana, Fountain Valley, CA USA

I will be 90 years old on July 28, 2011. (Born 1921) Katherine (Katrina) was my mother's favorite sister. My cousin Julia and my sister Jesse both asked me to come to Katherine's 75th birthday party. I went, and I'm glad because that's how I met Barbara [now his wife of 36 years].

I remember Katrina when she had a business in South San Francisco. I knew her husband, but not well. They were very close to my parents.

My father [Jamil Afana] had two brothers, Gabriel and Nicola. He and Uncle Gabriel made the Last Supper in Mother of Pearl that was exhibited at the World's Fair in San Diego. Later, Nicola had a ranch in Paso Robles. Gabriel and Nicola both died near Paso Robles and Pismo Beach.

My father was born in Bethlehem but I don't know when he was born. [Older siblings Jesse and George, now dead, had all the records.] He was 16 years old when he left home (Bethlehem). He was oldest of all the Afanas children. After his father died, he attended school [probably in Germany?] where he learned German. He also spoke French and Italian. He was at the St. Louis Fair when it opened. Before he settled in Long Beach, my dad traveled half the world for business – working for someone else- but liked the climate in Long Beach. Lots of places in Europe, Mexico, Pacific Island.

My mother, Jamileh Saade, was born in Bethlehem. My parents got married around 1911 because my brother George was born in 1912. I think they were married in Bethlehem. [Has wedding picture]. My mother spoke better English than my father and was a lot of help in his business.

When he (Jamil) came to the US, he met an Arab in NY, who 'sponsored' him, but he started treating him like a servant, so he left. Another man in NY, an American, took him in and taught him a lot about business. He was there long enough to get a start in buying and selling. He'd go door to door to sell. He (Jamil) left NY and started working his way to California, stopping at the Worlds' Fair in St. Louis, selling import/export of tapestry, jewelry, etc.

When he got to Long Beach, he decided that 'this was it.' Somewhere around 1916 [probably earlier], he established the business, Holy City Bazaar, on the Long Beach Pike. [A popular amusement park] There was a fountain at the Pike in Long Beach and my dad's name is on the top of the list. His business, Holy City Bazaar, was a prominent business in Long Beach. As a side business, he auctioned imported carpets (bought from dealers). He brought his father, mother and his brothers over from Bethlehem. My father died in Long Beach, and my grandmother (Yemma) as well.

He worked hard and invested his money in property in Long Beach. I remember him saying, "*If I didn't make a sale, I wouldn't eat*"

I used to have some of his mother of pearl, but I gave them to my kids.

My dad and mother never drove a car. I drove them a couple of times to Mexico to see the family. He bought serapes and brought them back for sale. When my mother was dying from cancer, she asked me to go to Bethlehem, the city where my parents were born, where I met my family. They treated me as a long lost brother.

Your uncle Fred and I were in the service together – National Guard in Long Beach. We were under age. We were stationed in Ventura. After WW2 was declared, we were shipped out on a troop transport to the South Pacific. I was injured - damaged inner ear - which has affected my balance since then. Under care of the Veterans Admin.